

# DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 36 No. 5

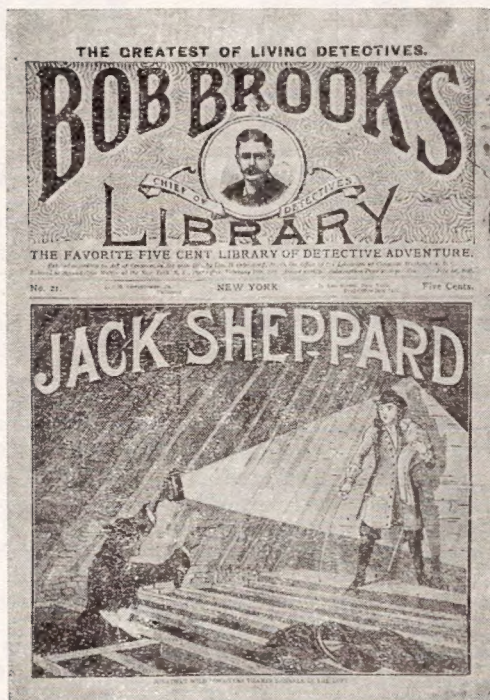
May 15, 1967

Whole No. 416

## The Beadle Brothers, Erastus and Irwin

By John C. Kunzog

(Conclusion)



### DIME NOVEL SKETCHES

#### BOB BROOKS LIBRARY

Publisher: Lou H. Ostendorff, 14 Ann St., New York, N. Y. Schedule of Issue: Weekly. Dates: Feb. 15, 1893 to August 16, 1893. Issues: 27. Price: 5c each. Pages: 16. Size:  $11\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ . Illustrations: Black and White cover. Contents: Short-lived imitations of Nick Carter stories. Very rare.

## The Beadle Brothers Erastus and Irwin

By John C. Kunzog

(Conclusion)

The introductory address said, in part:

Dear Children and Youth:

We here present you with the first number of the Youth's Casket. We have taken great pains to make it acceptable to you. \* \* \* There are few periodicals published especially for children and youth, but those few, so far as we are acquainted with them, are excellent. We hope you will think the Casket deserving a place by their side on your table.

That Erastus Beadle had some say regarding the text matter is evident, for indian stories appeared in nearly every issue. Among the contents for the first volume were these titles:

The Indians and the Firewater, The Indian King, Mandan Chief, Early Remembrances, The Burning Village, Treaty With the Indians, Death of Tecumseh.

Beadle's first partner in the Youth's Casket withdrew in 1853 and Erastus made Irwin a partner in the magazine, but the arrangement did not last long.

One day, according to my informant, Erastus was called away on a business matter. On his return he found Irwin in his cups, important stereotype work untouched. Angry words passed between them, and as Erastus was in reality the sole owner, the so-called partnership was dissolved then and there.

Perhaps it was the bitterness engendered by this dissolution that made Erastus dissatisfied with the Youth's Casket. Again he broached the subject of Dime Novels to Phinney. Eras-

THE

## YOUTH'S CASKET:

AN

*Illustrated Magazine for the Young.*



JAMES O. BRAYMAN, EDITOR.

Vol. III.

BUFFALO:

PUBLISHED BY E. F. BEADLE.

1854.

tus wanted something on a higher plane than a juvenile publication. Phinney suggested a new magazine—The Home Monthly. But before making a decision Erastus sought backing in another city. In the Erie, Pa., Dispatch of September 2, 1922, Bert Wurzbach tells of E. R. Beadle visiting that city in 1855 and "planned to establish his Dime Novels there, but was discouraged by financiers." This corroborates the story told me by Rhinehart, and it is possible that he sought financial aid in other cities.

Returning to Buffalo he launched the Home Monthly, yet some invisible

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goad kept Erastus from finding contentment. Irwin had opened a newsroom, stationery and book store, and his wife and Mrs. Erastus Beadle during the Christmas holiday season effected a reconciliation among the brothers.

The new magazine did not appeal to Erastus. It was similar to many on the market, so a short time afterward he placed the business in the hands of his brother and Robert Adams and sallied forth again in search of capital for launching the Dime Novel. He went to Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago. He worked at his trade nights whenever he could and in daytime tried to interest financiers in the Dime Novel.

In Chicago the counting rooms were in excitement over the prodigious profits being made in Western land speculation. One moneyed-man, gray at the temples, suggested to Beadle to make the western trek, make his stake and then return to the East and launch his publishing enterprise. "If I were younger," he said, "I certainly would get some of the easy money."

Beadle worked his way westward (Mr. Rhinehart said to Oklahoma). Regardless of the location, it was not the rainbow's end, for Beadle found no pot of gold. He fell for every confidence game offered. "County rights" was the supposedly open sesame to riches, yet Beadle found populous settlements already surfeited with the item, while in the hinterland the inhabitants were so poverty stricken that they had no means with which to purchase anything but bare necessities.

Erastus found himself in contradiction of King Midas—for everything he tried turned to pyrites. He was, he said, a successful failure. Yet he never lost heart. In his darkest hours he could always reach out and touch his hypothetical Dime Novels and thrill to their golden dream.

In the West Beadle was enthralled watching the endless flow of restless humanity that surged from settlement to settlement, town to town, camp to

camp, following the elusive will-of-the-wisp in their quest for gold. He spent much of his time listening to tales about the Indians on the rampage, of trappers matching their wits against the cunning of Indians, animals and the wilderness, of outlaws out-smarting the lawmen.

The more tales he heard as he scanned the scabrous scoundrels that infested every community, the more he was convinced that these stories written in the uncouth vernacular of the West, would prove a form of literature eagerly read in the East.

To take care of current expenses, Beadle frequently worked at some print shop, usually "sticking type." Some of these proceeds were sent to his wife, who had returned to Cooperstown.

Beadle learned from his contact with the public that most of the seekers of wealth in the West were financed or "grubstaked" by New Yorkers.

"In New York you can get financing for anything," he was told. Clutching at this straw of hope he returned to Buffalo, arriving there practically penniless. His only wealth was in the stories with which he regaled his brother Irwin and Robert Adams. They had heard him talk of Dime Novels before without interest, but now, somehow, a golden glow seemed to diffuse his stories of the West and his partners knew there was a market for such tales. Their enthusiasm was such that their interest in the two publications was sold and the three set out for New York.

Many attentive ears listened to the plan of launching a cheap form of literature, and many a moneyed-man juggled a goosequill pen as he figured costs against potential revenue, and always, on the return of Beadle he was given a negative answer. But cold columns of figures could not dim the hopes of the dreamer.

In the meantime the three men were practical. They worked at their trade whenever they had an oppor-



tunity, thus conserving what little capital they had.

While in Buffalo, Irwin had operated a news room. One of the big selling items to transients was what today is referred to in antique circles as letter sheets. They were sheets of ruled paper for correspondence, about 6x9 inches, but on the left side, overprinted on the faint lines of ruling, were the lyrics of some popular song.

In New York City Irwin, haunting the lager saloons, heard many new songs—sea chanties, canal songs, bar room ballads and ribald songs and poetry of the streets. He found a print shop where he could swap his services for permission to set the type for these letter sheets, and also make matrices and stereotype plates. He had these letter sheets printed in gangs of eight.

New York proved a good market for this stationery. Its floating population was large, while permanent residents always were intrigued with some novelty. The poetical selections were such as to appeal to all classes, and as the sales mounted, Irwin found himself in better financial circumstances than his partners.

On most of these items no envelope was needed. The paper was folded twice and closed with sealing wax, a stamp affixed and it was ready for the U. S. mails. At that period, a stick of sealing wax and a burning taper was part of the equipment of all public desks at postoffices.

These letter sheets were the precursors of the scenic postcards. Each time a person wrote home or to a friend, a different style sheet was used. "I heard this song sung at Bowery Saloon last night and thought you might like it," was the opening paragraph of many a letter at that period.

With a tinge of envy Erastus Beadle related how Irwin could visualize profits from some ordinary event with his letter sheets. Like in March, when he had some sheets printed in green ink containing some Irish song or poetry honoring St. Patrick or with

shamrocks and leprechauns as the motif, which sold in great numbers to the Irish "canawlers," as the canal men were termed.

Irwin liked the bright lights and the gay spirit found in the lager saloons. His mission was well known by other patrons. He was sociable, well-liked and made the acquaintance of many gay young blades who had money. And it is this writer's belief that it was in this environment that Irwin found what Erastus had spent years searching for—someone with faith in this literary venture to sponsor it financially. Or it may have been one of the dealers who handled the letter sheets that was willing to put up the capital needed to issue the first Dime Novel.

There had to be a financial backer. The two Beadles and Robert Adams couldn't earn enough money in Buffalo and certainly were less capable of earning the money required in New York City, where their living expenses were higher. Financing the first Dime Novel was not in the realm of three itinerant craftsmen. It is a facet never brought up before, but certainly is worthy of careful scrutiny.

The cost of the rights to Malaeska is given at \$250.00. At the price of 10c it would require 2,500 copies of the Dime Novel at retail to pay for the manuscript, but as retailers' profits and distribution costs are taken into consideration, it would take 5000 copies to cover this detail.

Then there was the cost of paper, printing and binding; business expenses and incidentals. Thus, to even show a modicum of profit, a minimum of 25,000 copies had to be printed and sold. Hazarding a guess of printing costs at four cents per copy, there was a bill of \$1,000.00—a sum no printer would extend credit to three unestablished persons and their nebulous scheme.

In June, 1860, the first Dime Novel appeared, opening the raw wounds of brother rancor, for on the cover appeared the legend: "Beadle's Dime Novels. Irwin P. Beadle & Co."



It was the old, old story that often has befallen geniuses. One man conceives, another wins the glory.

Collector's of the early Dime Novels may have observed the title, "Beadle's Dime Novels." It is singular possessive, and pertained to Irwin Beadle only; likewise, when the inscription became "Beadle's and Adams."

This re-opened the schism between the two brothers. Irwin, secretly fanning the smouldering coals of resentment over his dismissal from the stereotype foundry some years earlier, had abided his time and now at the opportune moment, in the argot of Dime Novel authors: "dipped the arrow of revenge in the venom of malice and sent the poisoned shaft flying to find its mark in the heart of his brother, and gloating over the discomfiture of Erastus as he saw his brainchild adopted by another." Irwin had his revenge and Erastus, the dreamer, was merely tolerated in the company and had no voice in the management in the growing young industry of low-priced literature.

It is plausible to presume that the unknown financial angel, foreseeing a tremendous demand for the novels, advanced more money so new titles could be issued.

Success again dulled the senses of Irwin and he became what today would be termed an alcoholic. He neglected business affairs fully aware that his brother would manage things far better than he could. Then, without Irwin's knowledge, Erastus was enthroned as head of the company.

But by whom, and by what authority? It is quite apparent that the unknown backer, to protect his holdings, acted when Irwin Beadle became derelict in his duties. This unknown party, knowing from Irwin the dream and story of Erastus, proceeded to place the latter in charge of the concern, confident he would prove competent. So with this change, the title "Beadle's Dime Novels" continued to appear, its singular possessive now pertained to Erastus.

With Erastus in control of the company, the rancor of Irwin grew into hatred and the two brothers were not even on speaking terms. Press, pulpit and moral crusaders predicted no good end for readers of Dime Novels, and this certainly held true for the real founder—Irwin—who, upon being ousted from his position in the concern, sought surcease from his troubles in the bottle. He died a drunkard's death, and when Erastus attended the simple funeral, the wounds of the past had not been healed.

Erastus was well liked socially and in business circles. He was an exponent in the use of "soft soap" or, as it was termed at that period, "soft sawder." He loved to relate how he conceived the Dime Novel while working in a print shop in Fredonia, Chautauqua County, N. Y., and there were few men in publishing circles that did not know all the facets of Erastus Beadles' golden dream. But Erastus had set a price of ten cents on the books. When competitors entered the field with a nickel novel, profits tobogganed to a dangerous point and huge circulation was needed to show a profit.

Erastus had, in today's vernacular, "a one-track mind." Throughout the years he visualized only two types of stories—Indian and Western—and when the public became cloyed with this type of literature, it was the other directors of the company that brought about other types of stories.

Erastus was ensconced high on the ladder of success, where he could survey the public's insatiable hunger for cheap literature and the ever-increasing demand for his brainchild. Redskin after redskin bit the dust as Erastus, sitting serene and safe in the saddle of his publishing domain, urged his literary steed over the plains of popularity, with the tinkle of small coins far exceeding the flying arrows and whining bullets of the tales.

The death of his wife in 1889 made Erastus dissatisfied with the city. He retired from the firm after guiding



its destinies for over a quarter century. He had maintained a summer home at Cooperstown, a remodeled old house which he named Glimmerview, and here he made his home in his declining years.

He was in the village every day and to all who would listen, he would relate the story of his life, his dream and the Dime Novel.

He died December 18, 1894.

Four years later, almost to the day, December 9, 1898, the first number of *Work and Win* was published. Its hero, Fred Fearnot, while attending Avon Academy, was such a noble example of American manhood that the town was renamed Fredonia in his honor. This was the town where Fred Fearnot, Terry Olcott and their chums strolled through the stories of *Work and Win*. It was, in reality, the town where Erastus conceived the Dime Novel. Historically, it was a place of freedom, so was christened Fredonia. But Beadle told his tale so often, that an author made capital of the town's name and the library's hero. Beadle would have liked it.

Had it not been for the moral scruples of Elihu Phinney, Jr., who refused to compromise with a principle, Buffalo might have become the publishing center for this lurid literature that for nearly six decades was condemned by pulpit and press, by teacher and purist, and while these purists were decrying the demoralizing effects of this literature rubbish, scores of authors indited in longhand the stories to fill the insatiable maw of printing presses that rolled day and night to supply America with low-priced reading material. Buffalo would have been an ideal site, for it is about 50 miles from Fredonia, N. Y., where Erastus Beadle, as a youth, visualized the possibilities of the Dime Novel while toiling in the printshop of a country weekly.

## EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. LeBlanc: I am getting a lot of enjoyment out of the Roundup. Sure brings back memories of "them thar days." Being past 75 years of age guess I can qualify for being "an old coot." I detest the term "senior citizen" as from my point of view—what is wrong with being old. I, for one, am more or less proud of it. Best wishes and lots of luck to you and all the old timers.—Lou Dreyer, Pasadena, Calif.

## NEWSY NEWS Ralph F. Cummings

Gerald J. MacIntosh says he was able to get a "blue print" copy of the story on Tip Top and the Merriwells that was in "Illustrated Sports Magazine" for Dec. 24, 1962. It was by Robert H. Boyle, and was called Frank Merriwell's Triumph, or How Yale's Great Athlete Captured American Fancy, Purified the Penny Dreadfuls and Became Immortal." It is Tip Top size and 9 pages in length, and is the best of all that kind of stuff I have ever seen or heard of. The name of J. P. Guinon in Little Rock is mentioned on page 2 of the story. Gerald is sure glad he finally got hold of that one, as he had tried for a long time.

Albert E. Johnson has an annoying ear noise in one ear. Says it's not so bad in the day time as it is at night. He has gone to ear doctor after ear doctor, nothing can seem to stop it from buzzing. Then finally he went to an M.D. he knew several years ago who was an army doctor too — and was checked over by him and he said "Albert, when I get as old as you, I'll probably have the same thing as you!"

Albert asked him if he intended to send him to an ear doctor and he said

## MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

249. Mike Barrier, 5112 P Street, Little Rock, Ark. 72207 (New address)



"No! You'll go to one when you think it necessary." Al says it's very hard to sleep nights, so he gets up and reads, that way he gets some relief.

Have you seen the latest Ralph F. Cummings Flyers Mart? Lots of stuff in it for sale.

Carl Linville, 3311 Cardiff Av., Cincinnati, Ohio 45209, will trade rare copies of Starry Flag Weekly for his Blue & Grey wants #2, 5, 16, 27, 31, and 32. He'll trade 1 for 1. He'll buy All Sports Library 36, 38, 43, 44 and 45 that he needs. Who can help him. Starry Flag Weekly are very rare and scarce.

Wm. M. Claggett says since he lost his dear wife, he has to keep his mind occupied on something, as he misses her so much.

J. Randolph Cox, Northfield, Minn. loves to read the back issues of the old Dime Novel Roundups. Just now he is working on a couple of articles including one on Sherlock Holmes, for the Baker Street Journal, which will take a bit of reading and research first of all. He also likes Nick Carter as well as Shadow and Doc Savage comics.

## RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS

TRUE WEST, February 1967 issue. 25 YEARS OF GLORY, by J. Edward Leithead. A history of the western pulp magazines. Mr. Leithead shows their direct connection with the dime novels which preceded them. There are many excellent illustrations of the western pulps of the 1920's and 30's.

TRUE WEST, February 1967 issue. PULP WESTERNS, Late 1966 Market Guide, by J. P. Guinon. Mr. Guinon reviews the market and prices paid for western pulps. Included is a list of most western pulps with a charted price range depending on condition and scarcity.

Both Mr. Guinon and Mr. Leithead are regular contributors to the Dime Novel Roundup. It's nice to see their names in the commercial magazines.

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## FOR SALE

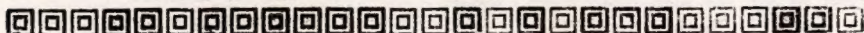
I have a few James Boys Weekly, left; also, Detective Library containing stories about the James Boys, Pluck and Luck, Secret Service, and Jack Wright stories in Boys Star Library.

I will buy Frank Reade Weekly.

ROY MORRIS

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No. 182		Camp in the Snow
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